DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 381 823 CS 508 886

AUTHOR Schroeder, Anthony B.
TITLE The Administrative View of the Educational Perspectives in Forensics Activities for the 21st Century.
PUB DATE 20 Nov 94
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (80th, New Orleans, LA, November 19-22, 1994).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; College Administration; *Debate; Department Heads; *Educational Objectives; Educational Trends; Evaluation; Futures (of Society); Higher Education; *Persuasive Discourse; Speech Communication
IDENTIFIERS Administrator Surveys

ABSTRACT

An open-ended survey was sent to speech communication department heads to determine their perceptions about forensics as an educational activity. Results showed that administrators overwhelmingly considered debate to have been the most important educational activity they engaged in when they were students; they attributed many of their administrative skills to forensics participation. However, these same individuals questioned whether students today are receiving the same educational benefits they did through forensic activities. Most said that winning seemed to be the objective of the activity and indicated that clear well-stated educational objectives were needed to guide the activity. Many suggested that an educational forum should be created on campus not only to showcase student abilities but also to teach students about the need for communication in argumentation, critical thinking and refutation. Students need to understand that those who use excessive speed in their speeches will not find it helpful in most career choices. According to Richard Paine, chair at North Central College, speech communication educators are paying too much attention to delivery issues and too little attention to the more critical dimensions of research, organization and solid reasoning." Coaches must develop educational objectives if forensics is to remain a productive, well-funded activity. (Contains 12 references.) (TB)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED 381 823

# The Administrative View of the Educational Perspectives in Forensics Activities for the 21st Century

by
Anthony B. Schroeder
Director of Forensics
Eastern New Mexico University
Portales, New Mexico 88130

Selected for presentation to the Speech Communication Association's Eighteenth Annual Convention, New Orleans, Louisiana
November 20, 1994

CS508886

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Anthony Schroeder
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## INTRODUCTION

As educational institutions prepare for the 21st century, many are using assessment plans to determine what is currently being achieved and to determine what will be needed in the future. The institutional mission statement is being used to determine if objectives are achieved. State legislatures are asking about the return on the financial investment and about the preparation/quality of the graduates. Likewise, administrators are now looking at various programs to determine what if anything is being accomplished. Boyer in 1987 put the first big cannon ball across the bow, questioning the very fiber of evaluation of undergraduate instruction and the evaluation and tenure of faculty. Perceptions about the worth or role of an activity in an educational institution are due to a number of factors, among those factors is the administrative view of mission. The purpose of this paper is to reveal some of those perceptions. Forensics is an undergraduate activity and a graduate recruiting activity, which suggests that we should look at its effects, practices, and future in higher education.

Forensics, or competitive speech activities, clearly fits within the mission of the institution, and may have a more integral relationship with the educational mission than other activities. Many administrators view forensics as the activity that draws the "best and the brightest". What is the current image? Do educational objectives past compare with educational objectives present? Do educational practices past in forensics compare with education practices present?

## CONCERNS

The forensics activity has changed over the years. Fifty to sixty years ago the event was audience oriented with each institution selecting two students to represent them in the event (Albion College, University of Michigan, and Wayne State University archives). Debate was audience oriented. The

purpose was to inform and persuade. The event was advertised and promoted to such an extent that administrators, faculty, and the community were made aware of the activity. These audiences were interested in the topic, discussed the arguments presented, and the behaviors of each team. The skill and the intellect of the debater was measured by everyone attending. The point is attention, focus on the activity, observations of skill.

Administrators recognized the value of forensics and encouraged more students to be involved, with more students involved it became necessary to provide more opportunities for debate and other speaking events. The tournament format provided this educational opportunity. The tournament was instructional in nature initially but soon awards began to dominate the activity. As tournaments grew in size and number of rounds of competition the audience was forgotten and with it awareness by the administration. Sporting activities not only promote the event but involve the administrative team in the process. Sports is for many institutions the mission of the educational institution. A winning football or basketball gives them press coverage and recognition. A winning season, even national championships in debate or individual events may only result in a note of appreciation from the dean, occasionally the vice-president or Academic Affairs and the President of the institution.

Questions to be considered. When did the forensics program last involve a member of the administrative team? Invited to judge? Invited to attend a tournament? Personally invited to view a campus activity to show case the critical thinking, and speaking skills of the team?

If the speech team is successful, wins nationals or finishes in the top five, is it acknowledged? Does the administration respond?

Acknowledgment and support of a program is directly related to the program meeting stated objectives and the resulting image. Recent literature focuses on the educational purpose of forensics (Manchester, 1981; Littlefield, 1988; Greenstreet, 1990; Albert, 1991; Sellnow and Seekins, 1992; Hamm, 1993).

The educational concerns mission of the university and all activities must be consistent. Regents, members of the legislature, and administrators face the issue of meeting the mission of the institution with a limited budget. Activities are measured in terms of meeting the objectives.

Littlefield (1988) discusses the perceived benefits from forensics programs noting that administrators felt that competitive speech programs enhanced the recruitment of students and faculty, scholarship, and to enhance the educational experience of students. Littlefield documents a decline in the number of forensics programs, noting however, that the vast majority of responding administrators felt that the greatest benefit of forensics to their respective institutions was the enhanced educational experiences for their students.

Four years later, Sellnow and Seekins (1992, p.1) made the assumption that "administrators need help in seeing the inherent value of forensics education." Manchester (1981), Greenstreet (1990), and Sellnow and Seekins (1992) argue that the success or failure of a program is measured by educational objectives, with the assumption that the activity should be coached, administered, and justified by educational objectives.

Jackson (1991) makes the case of debate having a very positive influence on students. Kaye (1991) in an article published in The Chronicle of Higher Education argues that colleges must prepare the next generation of public figures and intellectuals. Kaye placed forensics in the principal role of training critical thinking, public debate, training in argumentation, and foundation of argument in history, humanities, and social sciences.

Hubbard (1991) discovered that if debaters were to select one argument, CEDA debaters would select the nuclear war scenario. He argues further that this scenario provided the link to the "real world". The interesting aspect of this finding is that the topic of debate is not germane. If the opportunity to link is available take it, even if not "take it". For years, debaters and persuasive speakers have used "dead babies on the flow" to provide impact for their arguments, or used "pathos" to win the critic/coach rather than "logos".

Greenstreet (1990), and Sellnow and Seekins (1992) introduce the notion of experimental education, arguing that forensics is an experimental activity and values and activities should be seen from that perspective. What do participants in forensics learn? As an administrator, I approached this paper from the educational perspective. Assessment is playing a more predominant

role in the lives of administrators, and interested regents, state officers of education, and members of the legislator. What is the value of forensics?

Where is the critic? What is the role of the critic? NDT of a few years ago and now CEDA debate desires a judge to be "tabula rasa". According to The American Heritage Dictionary it could mean a clean slate - lacking bias, or "the unformed". It has meant in debate that the critic would evaluate the debate based on the arguments and evidence presented in that round of debate. The judge was not to bring in information at might influence his or her judgment (Thomas & Hart, 1987). This would suggest that if arguments were not refuted, even if wrong, they stand because of lack of refutation. This would suggest that debate critics ignore fallacies of reasoning, evidence, nature and structure of argument. Ashmore (1979) argued that the critic brought to the event knowledge about argument construction, refutation, and communication skills which should be used as a standard. CEDA placed emphasis on these standards, however, some coaches and debaters view these standards as bias. The idea of adapt to the audience or judge is often ignored and the issue of bias is raised to explain / rationalize decisions.

Recent discussions/arguments in CEDA focus on the educational nature of the activity as did previous discussions about NDT. The issue appears to the role of the critic. Is the coach/critic performing an educational function? Is it the role of the critic to mention lack of preparation? Is it the role of the critic to evaluate arguments, note the lack of clash, or missing logical links to arguments? Some debaters and coaches may prefer "tabula rasa" judges, because the tabula rasa approach prohibits judges intervention, however recent trends involve the statement of a judging philosophy. CEDA made the attempt a few years ago to give the activity an educational orientation, suggesting that debaters should adapt to the critics preferences. The coach/critic should act as an educator evaluating the nature of argumentation, refutation, fallacies, reasoning, and communication skills.

## PROCEDURE

Assuming forensics is an educational activity, I surveyed a variety of department heads to determine their perceptions of the activity. Names were taken from the current list of department heads listed in the SCA directory.

Letters were sent asking administrators to respond to a variety of open ended questions. I used open ended questions, so that I might receive written remarks. I assured those responding, confidentiality if they indicated that they did not want their name revealed. The questions asked about participation, skills learned from forensics, the impact of participation, perceptions of forensics, academic expectations, contributions of forensics to their academic programs. Questions were also asked about coaching, and nature of the program.

## RESULTS

The responses cast a very positive reflection on the value of the activity. These are a few of the comments about personal importance. James Greenwood, Chairperson at the University of Findlay wrote, "Debate was more important to my career than any single course on the undergraduate and graduate level. Debate develops skills in organization, clarity and depth of analysis that most students do not encounter until the master's thesis." Bill Hill from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill responds "...[T]hat experience (high school and college forensics) was probably the single most valuable educational experience I have ever had. I believe that participating in forensics helped me develop and refine skills in speaking, research, organization, analysis, reasoning, and advocacy." John Olson, from Everett Community College stated, "My perception is that forensics contributed positively to my educational development. In addition to the fundamental argumentation and presentational skills I learned and polished in that program, I also gained experience in dealing with people that I otherwise would not have met." Don Boileau, Chairperson at George Mason University comments that he would not be in communication if he had not got involved in forensics, "[A]s chair I am constantly drawing upon impromptu and exempt abilities at meetings. The ability to give a competent speech is attributable to the coaching I received in both high school and college." Timothy Hegstrom, chair at San Jose State University stated, "It was of singular significance in my education and academic development." Another response is "It's the best activity in class or extra-curricular in which any student can participate." Charles Bantz, chairperson at Arizona State University wrote, "My understanding of forensics is that it contributes to the University as a whole, our Department, and certainly to the participants. The participants can learn speaking, thinking, research, and teamwork skills. . . The University gains greatly by our enhanced scholarly reputation--forensics is after all one of the

few nationally visible intellectual activities by undergraduates. The forensics program has helped us recruit outstanding undergraduates."

These comments present a perspective about the contribution forensics participation has had on the respondents. To summarize these and other responses about the contribution of participation, the information supports the conclusion that participation contributed -- to critical thinking, listening, argumentation, research, organization, group interaction, self confidence, and speaking skill.

it offers to today's students suggests that

Perceptions about forensics and what
something has changed over the years. Most respondents indicate that educational objectives are not involved. Randy Kluver, Chairperson at Oklahoma City University wrote, "I do believe that forensics has intrinsic educational value, but only if we treat it as an educational activity." Don Boileau of George Mason University comments that, "The casualness of debate. They are quickly losing all rationale for a communication standard for the activity." Rhonda Kekke, chairperson at Kirkwood Community College states, "I came to view competitive speaking as quite detrimental to the kind of communication attitude I was trying to foster in students." Jerry Callahan, chairperson of San Jacinto College Central wrote, ...[D]ebate has become a sterile, esoteric exercise in quick-speak non-communication for the very few. Getting a decision may mean that the debater possesses good evidence, or perhaps good arguments, or perhaps is just less unintelligible than the opponent, or perhaps looks smarter." Erwin Bettinghaus, Dean Michigan State University stated, "It can and does teach critical thinking, but it also teaches glibness and a pattern of speech that I find bothersome." Thomas Steinfatt, chairperson, University of Miami wrote, "Debaters are in my opinion, absolutely atrocious public speakers. I have argued long and hard for the type of change CEDA was supposed to bring about but clearly didn't." Another response argued that forensics . . . [E]xclusionary practices have relegated us to the category of esoterica, and left us unwelcome in the mainstream." Sue DeWine, Chairperson at Ohio University stated, "Unfortunately, debate, in my opinion, has lost its value to the student! First NDT became so unrealistic and was closely followed by what was supposed to save debate, CEDA. I think we should restructure this event all over again." John Sisco, Chairperson at Southwest Missouri State University expressed his concerns with, "In my opinion forensics programs and especially the tournaments must get back to a sense of communication. I

regularly worry that some ranking administrator will witness the "rag tag attired" and "audience insensitive" rounds which I have judged in the last few years." Jeffrey McCall, Chairperson at DePauw writes, "This year our Director of Forensics, Robert O. Weiss, has concluded that CEDA debate (which he has long supported) has become too bizarre for public consumption and, with strong department support, has chosen to commit the debate teams to the fledgling National Educational Debate Association." Bill Hill of the University of North Carolina identifies 3 major issues (1) educational agenda, (2) leadership, and (3) organizational problems. Ozzie Banicki, Chair of Prairie View A&M University suggests that debate may be excellent training for being an auctioneer. David Robinson, chairperson at Youngstown State University stated, "CEDA turned out to be a big disappointment, since CEDA quickly came to emulate the stylistic horrors of NDT."

Most of the negative remarks are about debate, CEDA debate in particular. Most focus on delivery skills and lack of audience adaptation. Many administrators made references to real world persuasion where arguments are tested in the public market place of ideas, requiring communication and understanding of ideas. The comments focus attention on the structure of argument, use of evidence, the lack of refutation and communication skills. Timothy Hegstrom, Chair at San Jose State University noted, "This problem has reached crisis proportions in my estimation. Several years ago I noticed a New Republic article that chided the college coaches for what they had done to educational debate."

Negative comments about individual events focus on essentially the same kind of remarks. The critic/judge is a "genius" if the competitor is ranked 1 with high points, and an "idiot" if the ranking is 4 with average points, comments are not read for their educational value. However, in a content analysis of ballots Carey & Rodier (1987) found that most judges do not provide a rational for the decision, make "very personal" comments and tell the competitor of their preferences. The average ballot contained 11 comments, with many sentence fragments. The ballot is the pivotal point or the educational medium to instruct. Ballots on the secondary level often instruct the critic as to what is important and how to evaluate it. Ballots on the collegiate level do not provide these same guidelines. Many administrators noted that individual event competitors are emphasizing delivery. Often the quality of the literature is overlooked, the intent of the author ignored or violated (if the competitor even knows the intent),

interpretative readings are selected for shock value. The Rhetorical Criticism event has become communication analysis because we are not training our students in rhetorical theory at both the undergraduate and graduate level. The quality of argumentation has declined in persuasion in favor of a "slick delivery". Are we emphasizing elocution? Professor Robinson of Youngstown State University notes that, "Stereotyped, stultified 'disease of the week' speeches have driven everything else out of persuasion; the level of language usage has become at best pedestrian -- nobody in the contests dares trust his/her fate to imaginative, figurative language. It bothers me that out in the 'real world,' speeches are still noticed and remembered for their stylistic excellence, but that we have fundamentally driven such characteristics out of intercollegiate forensics discourse."

On the positive side, Michael Hazen, Chairperson at Wake Forest University comments, that ...[F]orensics is an important part of the field of communication. It is one of those co-curricular areas that allows us to directly put into practice some of those things that are important in our discipline." Bettinghaus, at Michigan State University argues that the main reason for keeping it is for recruiting "the best and brightest" students. Boileau from George Mason indicates that he views "[T]he activities as a valuable extension of the classroom and a teaching lab for students both in the department and non-majors."

Concerns expressed by various individuals are best characterized by John Sisco from Southwest Missouri State University, "In my opinion forensics programs and especially the tournaments must get back to a sense of communication." Richard Paine, Chairperson at North Central College, "Frankly, I think forensics is moving in the wrong direction. I.E. (specifically in the case of public address and limited prep events) is moving in the direction of the Elocutionary school. We are focusing on tangential delivery issues and paying relatively little attention to the more critical dimensions of research, organization, and solid reasoning. . . Debate, too, seems to be moving away from "direct clash" and toward relatively irrelevant pre-fabricated argumentation and "tricks". I realize that this sounds terribly cynical - but it is, I fear, an accurate reflection of what I feel. The activity isn't to blame - the people involved in it are (especially we coach-judges). Both individual events and debate can have tremendously valuable impacts on the lives of students."

Why? William Robinson, Chairperson at Purdue University - Calumet, stated "I believe that forensics has become a 'step child' of the discipline, one that is often ignored, if not largely discredited." The reasons for this condition, in the opinion of the author of this paper are many, most notable is the lack of educational leadership, the deteriorating quality of debate, the fragmentation of the activity, the perceived expense of the program to the institution, the perceived lack of presence on the campus, the perceived lack of scholarship on the part of faculty and students. The issue of faculty evaluation is critical to the activity. Scholarship that is narrowly defined by our major research institutions often cut the contributions of the "teacher" to nothing. Boyer (1987) questioned the educational agenda of the university system by asking about students and the quality of teaching. I would argue that the educational objectives associated with debate are not of merit to an institution merely counting the number of articles published. Albert (1991) indicates that most institutions have a very narrow definition of scholarship which rules out the "scholarship" in forensics. Albert also argues that what the forensics coach is doing does contribute as "knowledge-producing" research. Because an institution "out publishes" in the major journals another institution does not have bearing on the quality of instruction, if a relationship exists, it may be an inverse relationship, or it other words, detrimental.

Dean Bettinghaus of Michigan State University indicated from his many years of experience that once a debate coach is tenured his/her first request is to be relieved of coaching. Most institutions do not tenure forensics coaches, consequently interests must turn to publishable research. Leaving many programs with have graduate assistants setting the objectives. Are the objectives educational in nature? In many cases, as these letters indicate, the answer is no. Securing a job, and a second job, is measured in terms wins, not the educational contribution the of individual. Are we asking about the educational contribution ever? Is a string of published articles an educational contribution to be felt on the campus? How many people read the average journal article?

As institutions move toward assessment, the activity must be evaluated in terms of educational objectives. Robert Chamberlain, chairperson at Seattle Pacific University writes, "We have designed our curriculum to encourage argumentation students into debate, and forensics students into

argumentation, and probably that has had some effect. But we have not monitored the effect." Professor Chamberlain is very candid in saying that forensics participation is not important academically. My question is, is it the activity or the lack of leadership in debate? Many comments suggest it is the activity at fault. I do not agree. WE, you and I, the coaches and critics are the activity. The blame is ours to share, by not demanding that students adhere to the stated rules and objectives of the activity. The instructional tool of the activity is the ballot. We are getting what we are rewarding!

The crux of this paper is expressed by Timothy Hegstrom with the comment "When debate is at its best, it is because coaches stress the educational value of forensics with each other and with participants. When it becomes a game, when coaches encourage a social climate among students that fosters alcoholism and promiscuity, when sophistic tricks are valued more than argumentation theory, then forensics is a detriment to education." After a brief description of a debate he states, "Although this was an elimination round, these debaters were pathetic arguers. They had no concept of audience. They apparently thought that arguing consisted of reading a series of short quotations in a rapid-fire mode without any concern for explaining the relevance of these quotations or assessing their probative quality." Jay VerLinden, chairperson at Humboldt State University indicates that, "Forensics is most negative when instructors lose sight of its role as an educational activity and perceive of it only in terms of competitive success. When that happens I've seen schools engage in unethical practices and abuse students involved in the program. An educational emphasis, though, recognizes that forensics is a means to an end; a way to teach students that isn't matched in other settings."

## CONCLUSION

What have we learned? Administrators responding to my open ended survey overwhelming indicated that debate was the single most important educational activity they engaged in and attributed many of their administrative skills to forensics participation. However, these same individuals question if students today are receiving the same educational benefits. Most of the comments focus on the problems in the activity and even blame the activity. Most comment on winning as the objective of the activity and indicate a need for clear, well stated educational objectives to guide the activity. Many suggest that an educational forum must be created

on campus not only to "showcase" student abilities but to teach students about the need for communication in argumentation, critical thinking, refutation. Many times judges/coaches are considered inadequate if they can't flow a debate with the speakers going at full speed. Glynis Strause chair of Bee County Community College stated that we need to ...[P]repare and showcase their talents which will help them in their professional lives." Speakers that use excessive speed will not find it helpful in most career choices. The issue is not speed, spread, or pathos. The issue is coaches setting an educational objective for the future.

Forensics is consider a valuable education tool. Loren Dickinson, chair at Walla Walla College indicates that "Debate is now listed among the several options in the general studies line-up under philosophy. It's there because curriculum people liked what debate does for enhancing critical thinking." Kaye (1991) places forensics in the principal role of training critical thinking, public debate, training in argumentation, and foundation of argument in history, humanities, and social sciences if the academic setting is to prepare the next generation of public figures and intellectuals. Robert Street, Chairperson at Texas Tech University gives us this thought to ponder in closing, "Academically, I expect forensics to represent some of the best application of oral communication, in all its inventive, dispositional, logical, and ethical form. Forensics is probably where most students should be after their first course in public speaking. Argument and arguing are the key, I think. If we could integrate the best of what forensics provides in terms of argumentative skill into other courses, then we wouldn't be in need of forensics, except for its competitive value. But I don't believe we will soon see such integration to any great degree, so forensics remains unique and valuable in its own right."

The future of forensics is not going to be determined by budget cuts. It will be determined by the ability of the coaches to develop educational objectives and to effectively articulate the objectives to others involved in the activity. These objectives must be exhibited in the ballot.

References

Albert, L.S. (1991). Forensics as scholarly activity from the administrative perspective. Paper presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Atlanta, GA.

Ashmore, T.M. (1979, February). Debate is communication. Paper presented at the meeting of the Western Speech Communication Association,

Boyer, E.L. (1987). College: The undergraduate experience in America. New York: Harper & Row.

Carey, J & Rodier, R. (1987, November). Judging the judges: A content analysis of interpretation ballots. Paper presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Boston, MA.

Greenstreet, R.W. (1990, August). Public address events: Maximizing educational value. Paper presented at the meeting of the National Developmental Conference on Individual Events, Denver, CO.

Hubbard, B.K. (1991, November). Dropping the bomb in ceda. Paper presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Atlanta, GA.

Jackson, J.M. (1991). There ought to be a law: The legislative forum. English Journal, 80, 34-37.

Kaye, H.J. (1991). Colleges must prepare the next generation of public intellectuals. The Chronicle of Higher Education, A40, June 12, 1991.

Littlefield, R.S. (1988, November). University administrators and forensics: What do the officials think about the activity? Paper presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association, New Orleans, LA.

Manchester, B.B. (1991, November). The value of forensic competition for oral interpretation students. A position paper. Paper presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Anaheim, CA.

Morris, W. (Ed.) (1975). The American heritage dictionary of the English language. Boston: American Heritage Publishing Co.

Thomas, D.A. & Hart, J. (1987). Advanced debate: Readings in theory practice & teaching. Chicago, IL: National Textbook Company.